EYES THAT WERE BLIND

THE story of a soldier that Mr. Coningsby Dawson tells in Out to Win illustrates in a fine way that saying, "It is your eyes that prevent you from seeing." This man, before the war, was a village priest—and no credit to his calling. He had a sister who had spent her youth for him, and worshiped him beyond everything in the world. He took her adoration brutally for granted. At the outbreak of hostilities he joined the army and served bravely in the ranks until he was hopelessly blinded.

Having always been a thoroughly selfish man, he allowed his privation to drive him nearly to madness. He had used the world; now, for the first time, he had been used by it. His viciousness broke out in blasphemy; he hated both God and man. He made no distinction between people in the mass and the persons who tried to help him. His whole desire was to inflict as much pain as he himself suffered. When his sister came to visit him, he employed every ingenuity of word and gesture to cause her agony. Do what she would, he refused to allow her love either to reach or to comfort him. She was only a simple peasant woman. In her grief and loneliness she thought matters out and arrived at what seemed to her a practical solution. On her next visit to the hospital she asked to see the doctor.

"I love my brother," she said. "I have always given him everything. He has lost his eyes, and he cannot endure it. Because I love him, I could bear it better. I have been thinking, and I am sure it is possible; I want you to remove my eyes and to put them into his empty sockets."

When the priest was told of her offer he laughed derisively at her for a fool. Then the doctor told him the reason she had given for her intended sacrifice: "Because I love him, I could bear it better." The blinded man fell silent. All that day he refused food; in the eternal darkness, muffled by his bandages, he was arriving at the truth: she had been willing to suffer what he was now suffering because she loved him. The hand of love would have made the burden bearable; and if for her, why not for himself? At last, after years of refusal, the simplicity of her tenderness reached and touched him.

After a time he was discharged from the hospital and taken in hand by the teachers of the blind, who taught him to play the organ. One day his sister came and led him back to his village parish. Before the war, by his example, he was a danger to God and to man; now he sets a very human example of sainthood, laboring without ceasing for others more fortunate than himself. He has increased his efficiency for service by his blindness. Of him it is true that his eyes prevented him from seeing—from seeing the splendor that lay hidden in himself no less than in his fellow creatures.

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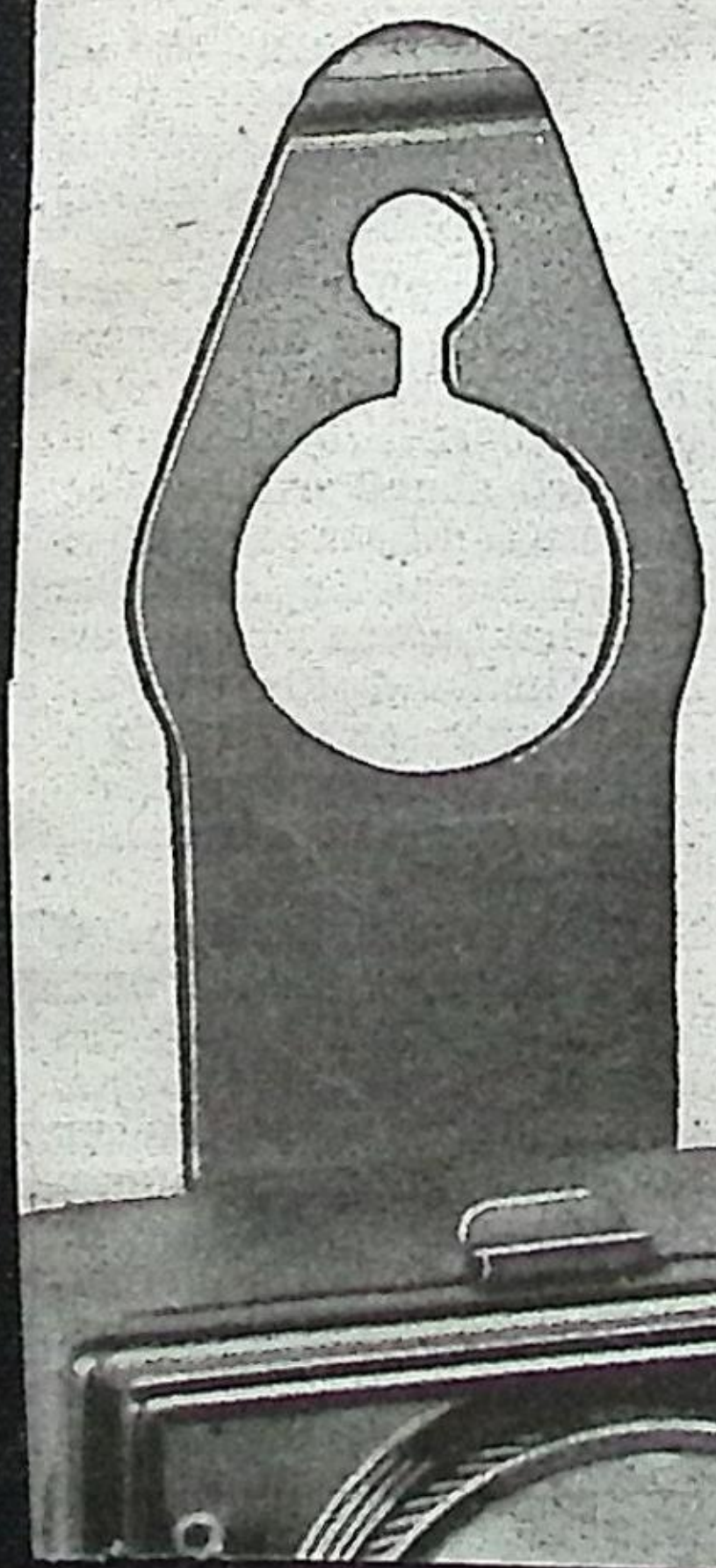

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